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A BRIEF STUDY SHOWING THE RELATION BETWEEN THE VOCABULARY AND TREATMENT OF THE ANNOTATED READING TEXT

Whether one is interested or not in manufacturing processes, the outstanding feature, standardization, is constantly forced upon one's attention. To one, however, who is mechanically inclined, the standardized technique of the automobile shop, for example, has a fatal fascination. He wonders why it is not possible to get somewhat similarly efficient results in the field of education, at least in any field involving technique, and the acquisition of a foreign language does involve the mastery of a technique. He realizes, of course, differences between the mechanical and the educational world, but while he recognizes that keen competition makes standardization of output, working within very close limits of mechanical accuracy, an absolute necessity; competition that is largely lacking in the school and college world, yet he is loath to let this appear the whole cause that forces the manufacturer to turn out a product 99 per cent. perfect and the lack of which allows a boy to pass in a subject with a grade of 60-75 per cent., or even less, in a subject which in its beginnings at least involves technical skill. At any rate, we should not be satisfied with the present state of affairs until we have left no stone unturned that will (1) standardize our product, (2) enable us most efficiently to teach this standardized product. No one would wish to belittle less than I the great advance that has been made in this country in the ways and means of teaching modern languages under school conditions. But when I think of what might have been done, if an equal amount of brain-power and

industry had been spent as in the factory world, I am somewhat downhearted and wonder if even after another generation we shall be very much farther along. Modern language method, modern language textbooks are still in the dilettante stage, and a great deal more of coördinated effort will have to be expended before we get out of this stage. If we do not make more definite progress along some lines of development, degeneration will set in, and, as I shall indirectly have occasion to indicate, I already see signs of it.

The main principles underlying the technical side of language acquisition are pretty well understood. Undoubtedly foreign language specialists who are at the same time trained psychologists will be able to prove to us the general correctness of these principles. And this will be well worth doing. What we need now more than anything else is concerted effort dealing with (1) the selection of the material, the standardization of the material to be employed and (2) presentation of material, the standardization or at least an evaluation of the ways and means of teaching the standardized material. From the narrower, technique side it is clear that it is of prime importance that these following fields at least should be as clearly defined as possible: (1) the vocabulary, (2) what is loosely included under the term grammar, (3) the evaluation of exercises that serve to coördinate these two factors. It is my purpose in this brief article to discuss particularly the first of these two fields, largely to bring home the great necessity for long continued, laborious work on this intricate problem.

That there is need of greater coöperation and greater clarity with regard to the vocabulary question, I believe I have shown in a brief contribution I made in the October, 1917, number of the *Monatshefte*. Among other things, I tried to prove that although beginners' books aim primarily to prepare pupils to read the foreign language, yet the writers of ten recently published text-books were all at sea regarding any sound basis for the selection of vocabulary, quantitatively as well as qualitatively. I regard it of the greatest importance to get this job done first, for what is done afterwards depends so much on what care has been taken in the organization of the beginners' vocabulary, in the selection and kind of control. At the present time, how-

ever, I wish to carry this whole matter one stage further, to the reading text stage, and offer some statistics and draw certain conclusions that I think are of value.

In order to present my case, I asked some of my students to take two recently published editions of that popular text, *Höher als die Kirche*. One other student made a comparison between the vocabularies of *Immensee* and *Höher als die Kirche*. I might say by way of offsetting criticism that in selecting just these two editions of *Höher als die Kirche* I had no other purpose than to make my points. Both these editions attempt to present the very newest style in annotated texts. In each case the text proper is fairly short compared with the accompanying apparatus, which includes all the modern exercises necessary for the intensive study of the material from the form as well as the thought side. What a far cry it is from those simple editions of an earlier day to these extraordinarily ingenious ones of the present time! It would be indeed interesting for some one to write the history of changes in text-book styles as we find them in this country.

The vocabulary of *Höher als die Kirche* contains roughly 2000 words. One edition, which hereafter we shall call edition A, has omitted the difficult opening chapter and in doing so the number of words has been reduced to about 1800. The complete annotated text we shall designate as edition B. Let us assume, in the first place, that the pupil has been brought up on the basic book of the series, to which edition A belongs, the beginners' book, and that the bare text of *Höher als die Kirche* is used for purposes of intensive study. That is, we will eliminate for the time being those considerable additions to the vocabulary, necessitated by the various exercises and other apparatus the annotated text contains. The basic beginners' book contains about 1980 words listed in the back. Of this number about 770, or 37 per cent., if we take the vocabulary at 1800, are common to the vocabulary of the reading text. But suppose the pupil has been brought up on another beginners' book. I examined one containing about the same size of vocabulary and found the percentage of words in common remains the same. They are not the same words, but the total does not differ numerically more than ten or so.

The two editors of this reading text, however, have not been

content with restricting themselves to the vocabulary proper of the text. In both cases they have seen fit to swell the original stock of words by over 1200 additional ones. Using the students' data, I was interested to learn how many of the added words, contained in edition A, were also to be found in the basic beginning book of the series, and I discovered that but about 300 were common to the two. If by any chance the teacher decided to use edition B of the other series, what would be the result? Of the extra words used in the notes and exercises of the two editions in question 26 per cent. are common to the two, and about 235 out of the 1165¹ extra words contained in edition B will also be found in the basic beginning book of edition A. It would, therefore, make very little difference from the numerical point of view which edition the teacher decided to use. I have not been able thus far to compare the added vocabularies of these two editions with a beginners' book that appears to contain a more representative early vocabulary than the one in question. I am inclined to think, however, after running through the additional words found in these edited texts so many times in my computations, that the percentage of words in common would not be increased. As a matter of fact, the nature of the additional words in the two editions is such that the percentage might very well be lowered. I personally feel that a very large number of the words introduced do not belong in an elementary text,—probably not, even if they are to be regarded as part of the passive vocabulary (reading vocabulary), most assuredly not, if they are intended, as they evidently are, as active vocabulary.

Before adding a new element to the discussion it might also be interesting to state the results of another computation. How often have the authors repeated these 1200 odd words that each has regarded it necessary to add? Edition A uses 891 out of 1240, taken as the basis of calculation, but once. That is, over 71 per cent. are not repeated. Seventy or 5.7 per cent. occur five times and over. Of these 70, the student has listed 30 under the general head of grammatical terms. By subtracting these grammatical terms the number of words frequently used would thus be reduced to 40 or 3.7 per cent. of the total number added. The

¹Not the whole number but taken as the basis of calculation.

number of words occurring often could be still further decreased by deducting the special words used in headings to exercises or in giving directions. Such words as "Übung," "Inhaltsfragen," "Sacherklärungen," are of course frequent. In edition B, the editor has employed 737 out of 1165 words (I have omitted the rather large list of proper names), taken as the basis of calculation, once, or 63 per cent. Sixty-nine plus 26 grammatical terms the student has listed as occurring five times or over.

Let us now assume that the teacher chooses to read *Immensee* with his class, and this is a very likely procedure, before taking up the text, *Höher als die Kirche*. What influence would this have on the vocabulary problem? *Immensee* has a word list of about 1825. About 660² of these are also found in *Höher als die Kirche*, or 36+ per cent. of the total. If the pupil has been brought up on the basic beginner's book before mentioned, the number of words at his command would be further increased by about 200. That is, upon taking up *Höher als die Kirche* he would possess through previous study of the basic book and *Immensee* 200 + 660 or 860 words out of 2000, or 43 per cent. of the vocabulary of *Höher als die Kirche*. These figures, however, do not take into consideration the additional words appearing in the annotated editions. If we do so, and first consider edition A, we find that of the 1240 added words about 296 are already contained in the beginners' book of the series and about 90 (after deducting duplicates) are in the vocabulary of *Immensee*. The pupil would thus upon beginning edition A of *Höher als die Kirche* know 40+ per cent., or 1246 (860³ + 296 + 90) out of 3040 (1800 + 1240). If edition B of the reading text were made the basis of study, the pupil would bring a knowledge of 36+ per cent., since in addition to the 860 words common to *Immensee* and the basic beginners' book of edition A, 237 of the added words are also to be found in the beginners' book and 50 additional ones are already in *Immensee*. [1147 (860 + 237 + 50) out of 3165 (2000 + 1165).]

Looking at the matter still further from the same point of view, a pupil who has studied intensively *Immensee* and then *Höher als*

²See footnote 1, page 6.

³This figure is probably somewhat high for edition A, inasmuch as the complete text is not given.

die Kirche will have to concern himself with 1825 words, the vocabulary of *Immensee*, plus 2000 words, the vocabulary of *Höher als die Kirche*, less 660 common to the two texts, or 3165 words. Then, if edition B of *Höher als die Kirche* is used with its elaborate exercises, etc., there must now be added to the number 3165 an additional 1165⁴ new words, less 132 common to *Immensee*, making a grand total of 4198. Moreover, we can fairly assume that the pupil has also been brought up on an edition of *Immensee* similar in style to that of *Höher als die Kirche*. That means, we shall have to add another list of words to the regular vocabulary of *Immensee*, and even though we allow for duplicates, the figure 4198 will mount still higher. Lastly, we must not forget to take into consideration the beginners' book with its differentiated vocabulary. Judging from our previous findings our final total will have also gleaned a goodly number of words from this first source: A rather stiff climb for the beginner to make within this initial stage—the first two years—of acquiring the language.

What are some of the conclusions one can safely arrive at from this brief study of vocabularies? Nothing is more fundamentally necessary to the attainment of real reading ability than the searching out and afterwards the treatment of the so-called basic vocabulary. It is by slowly and carefully building up a vital control of the common words of the foreign language that we best equip our pupils for the ready mastery of the reading text. It would, therefore, seem most desirable for any author of a beginners' book first to go carefully through the vocabularies of a selected list of reading texts. And this is particularly necessary for any one who is at the same time editing a general series. At least the basic texts of a reading course should first be selected and from the vocabularies of these as a guide the words contained in the initial text book should largely be chosen. The relation between the vocabulary of *Höher als die Kirche* and the basic beginners' book would, I am confident, then be closer. The vocabularies of the two books are approximately the same in size, yet only 38+ per cent. are common to the two. I have been able up to the present to study but one other beginners' book in this connection. The vocabulary of this text has

⁴Does not include about 100 proper and geographical names.

slightly over 1200 words and 48 per cent. of these will also be found in *Höher als die Kirche*. I admit, however, if the number of words of the beginning text more nearly approached in size that of the reading text, there probably would be a falling off in the percentage of words in common; a larger vocabulary in the beginners' book would very likely diverge from 1000 up. At present all that one can do is to guess at what words in *Höher als die Kirche* might be expected to be included in a carefully organized first book. The best rough estimate I am able to offer, after checking the words met with in *Höher als die Kirche*, is that it would not be too much to expect to find in a first book, having approximately the same number of words, 50 per cent. of the vocabulary identical with that of the reading text.

In the second place, additional words incorporated in the notes and exercises should be carefully considered from the point of view of the basic vocabulary. Wherever a modern language series is launched the words contained in the basic beginners' book should be one guide. The percentage of added new words is undoubtedly now very much too large. Moreover, individual editors of the series should know not only words they can profitably cull from the beginners' book, but also what pupils can reasonably be expected to know from previous reading and study of texts in the same series. To accomplish this object the chief editor would of course have to map out beforehand not only the main texts to be included in the series but also order them for the different years and where possible within the year. Lastly, the several sub-editors should both by study and agreement coöperate with regard to the number and range of words added for the intensive study of the reading text, keeping the number as low as possible. It would also be well, if each editor of a text had definite data with regard to the frequency of occurrence of words in the text. He should make use of this knowledge in organizing the textual apparatus and also see to it that the most essential of the added words are repeated far more often than they are at present. It is not wise to leave the repetition too much in the hands of the teacher. The job will not get done unless the editor by the manner of his work suggests and bolsters up the idea of repetition in every possible way.

To many, these suggestions will seem impracticable. It may not be very profitable commercially to follow them out, but they are pedagogically sound. If we are ever to solve the intricate problem of vocabulary building we must be less prodigal in the use of vocabulary,—particularly in the earlier stages,—and lay more stress upon intensive interlockings of the common words of the language. It is absurd for each editor to add from 50 to 60 per cent to the regular vocabulary of a text without first carefully considering what words have presumably occurred before.

Thus far I have suggested a very laborious way of organizing, from the point of view of numbers, the vocabularies of reading texts. I have not, however, touched upon the most vulnerable point of all in the present elaborate editing of texts. Granting that all kinds of interlocking devices are applied, thereby decreasing the aggregate number of new words a pupil has to face in taking up a new text, are we now on the right road in solving what is to be done with the text? This is a big question to which there are bound to be wide differences of opinion. I can but express my own.

Höher als die Kirche would normally be read by a German or one knowing the language well in about an hour or two. In a sense this is all the time the text is worth. Of course we cannot hope to put pupils through at such a lively pace. And yet ideally speaking that is what we are endeavoring to do. We are trying to enable our pupils to read German at approximately the same rate at which they read material in their mother tongue. The apparatus accompanying these recently annotated texts encourages no such procedure. Its whole purpose is to slow down the rate of progress from page to page. Through a plodding, intensive process the pupil is expected to gain a mastery of the text material from the language side, oral and written, and also acquire a knowledge of its cultural and literary background. One edition in question is particularly rich in material that accentuates history and art. Leaving aside these cultural elements and thinking for the present only of the linguistic side, the vocabulary, grammar, etc., how much time could a teacher profitably spend upon teaching such a text? Would a half year or even a longer period be too long? I think not, if it is to be done properly.

From my own experience with university graduate students training to become teachers, it is quite easy to spend one whole week in the way mapped out by these annotated texts on one or two pages of German, no more difficult than *Höher als die Kirche*, and even then they will not know the material any too well. The trouble with modern language teaching in this and every other country is that we regard too lightly the difficulties of teaching and holding intact the active vocabulary of the foreign language. The beginners' book used as an illustration contains, as I have stated, just under 2000 words. In the preface the author indicates that two years should normally be spent in which to complete the book. He even admits the word-list is somewhat large due to the inclusion of certain supplementary reading. Now I think that the author would be very well pleased indeed, if, at the end of two years, pupils did acquire even a fair mastery of these 2000 words. But *Höher als die Kirche* is a text normally taken up the second year of a four year course, or at the latest at the beginning of the third year. The few statistics I have been able to bring to bear in this discussion show, do they not, that the pupil will not only be expected to control the vocabulary of the beginners' book, but he will also have to strain every power to acquire the 1000 to 1200 words that the text proper contains, plus more than 900 words that are included either in the notes or exercises, making a total of at least 2000 new words. But my critics will say it is not expected that all the words shall be taught to come trippingly over the tongue. Well, do the authors indicate what are to be eliminated or treated but casually? The whole paraphernalia suggests that the pupil shall be taught to handle the text freely. Moreover, it will be said that I have forgotten in my computations the large number of compounds and the various other means of interlocking the vocabulary. No, I have considered these factors. If reading were all that is aimed at, if the acquisition of merely a passive vocabulary were desired, then undoubtedly the pupil, well grounded in the basic vocabulary, will be enabled thereby to increase very rapidly the merely reading vocabulary. But the passive vocabulary is one thing and the active is another when it is a question of learning to control. Because a pupil knows *Rat* and *Haus* it does not necessarily follow that *Rathaus* will automatically become his at his command.

The question what to do with the reading text beyond simply reading it is as yet unsettled. But admitting for the sake of argument that it is highly desirable to provide with elaborate trappings reading texts for all stages of the course, then it seems to me, if our ideal is efficiency of attainment, that a great deal of time and skill must be employed to get the text thoroughly taught. As this process slows down the pace of reading proper, not all texts, not more than two a year ought to come in for this intensive treatment. They would not be regarded as reading texts per se, but largely as raw material upon which to base all kinds of oral and written exercises that have always been found to be necessary in order to maintain the ground won through the beginning book and gradually to advance. The obvious objections to any such plan might be expressed as follows: (1) The material is not meaty enough to stand the requisite amount of drill to get the job well done, (2) The amount of required hammering would tend to ruin the text as a piece literature or as a story, (3) The vocabulary of the story itself may easily be too large, and will certainly be if editors are not more careful than at present. (4) Many words found in the story and in the notes would be taught as active vocabulary although they are manifestly not "active words."

A far better solution of this whole matter of the treatment of the reading text and its relation to the study of the language is this: (1) With regard to the editing of the reading texts themselves the element of grading should become operative. Those taken up early in the course ought not to have the elaborate apparatus now attached to them. As the course goes on, after the problem of the vocabulary is not so dominant a feature, such apparatus would be more in order. The first texts of the series would merely be provided with a simple lot of notes and exercises of the modern type. If this were the case, then the teacher could subject it to a very simple treatment beyond that of reading and which would not materially interfere with the rate of reading. Questions on the text, for example, would touch upon the high spots of the story and emphasize the really necessary words. The other exercises would serve a similar function. (2) Paralleling this kind of work in all years there should be a second basic book to follow the first rather grammatically con-

structed beginning book. This second book might consist of interesting though brief connected material which would serve as a basis for oral and written exercises of all kinds, vocabulary and grammatical drills. The chief point, however, that must not be lost sight of, is concerned with the vocabulary. In this second book a very large percentage of the words found in the first book should reappear. Moreover, the bulk of the additional words, and they will not be very many, should consist of those that are closely allied to the words already present in the first book. They would round out the several thought groups, build up and interweave the basic vocabulary psychologically and linguistically. The detailed study of such a book in the third and fourth years of a course, a book that did not contain more than 2000 words carefully selected and ordered and treated would, it seems to me, best safeguard the old active vocabulary and provide for the slow accretion of new words. Moreover, through the intensive study of a limited amount of material we should best get our pupils ready to handle the present type of annotated text, but not until towards the end of the course.

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